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THE SERENADE. A TRIPTYCH BY TORII KIYONAGA (1742-1815)

The Serenade

(*A Design by Kiyonaga*)

BY ARTHUR DAVISON FICKE

Before the gate he stands, and his flute whispers,
 His low flute whispers clear in the gathering twilight—
 He but a mortal, though his low flute whispers
 With an immortal sweetness. Where the moon
 Is rising slowly over the high hill
 Lurks the same magic; and the wandering stream
 That stretches far with indeterminate windings
 Into the happy void of far horizons
 Lifts the same dizzy song.

Joruri-hime!

Flute-notes and dusk are crying at your window,
 The stream is calling and the far horizons—
 And it is well you do not venture forth
 Into their magic. But your ladies pass
 Out of the quiet house, and in the garden
 With lanterns and untroubled scrutiny
 Seek to discern who plays before your gate
 Such perilous melody; and they will come
 At length back to the chambers where you wait,—
 And tell you that the player is a prince,
 A young man,—and a lover.

Where you wait

It is silent now and peaceful; the still room
 Is troubled only by the distant notes
 Of flute-song in the garden. And you stand,—
 You, Joruri-hime,—stand in wonder
 And know not what it is that sweeps your breast,—
 Knowing, only, that moonlight fills the garden
 And that the flute-song fills your soul and pours
 Over the world its tide of distant passion
 As might some terrible summer nightingale.
 Innocent, beautiful as moonlit flowers
 Dreaming in a remote and silent garden
 Where never noise of the loud world has come,—
 You, child, yet only half a child and half
 A woman, marvel and tremble at this song.
 Slowly to meet you move your attendant ladies—
 Slowly out of the garden they come back
 To tell you that it is a prince and lover,—
 A lost and exiled hero-prince and lover,—
 Waiting at your gate.

But not their lips can tell

All that the song to your uncertain heart
 Has cried already; and they cannot see
 The glad tomorrow nor the mad thereafter,—
 The night when you shall go beyond your garden
 To meet him in a hollow of the hills—
 Touching him, holding him, seeing the stars bend down
 As he bends down to clasp you. nor the day
 When he shall pass, obedient to the call
 Of his great doom, to lead with lightning-sword
 The Minamoto, conquering—while the slow
 Intricate windings of the little stream
 That passes by the covert of your garden
 Batter your frail white body to and fro

You cannot know! — And what if all were known? —
 This is the hour when the moon crowns the hills!
 This is the hour when the flute calls from your garden!

